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584 Method of Contracting a Marriage

[581] The Indian has many ways to conclude a naturally legitimate marriage. He must in the first place have good qualities as a hunter and worker. When he has selected the one who is to be the pearl of his eye and has enough courage to ask her parents for her personally, he makes his visits at night to the family /206/ of his intended. These visits are silent until [583] the old people ask him the reason for his coming. The young man at first is confused in his answers, but if he observes by the kindness of the questions that there is a thread of hope, he returns and from time to time makes gifts of maize, cheese, and fruits of his labors, such as gourds, beans, and birds hunted by him.

If the young man's manner pleases the old people, they do everything possible to get their daughter to consent, but often the suitor loses everything, either because the old people do not like him or because she abhors him. This last case happens particularly when the suitor is somewhat older (1).

[581] [579] 1. Among the Chiriguano nothing is appreciated but the manliness of a man and his goodness; looks, wealth, and the nobility of the house are of no value whatsoever.

When the young man is pusillanimous, a third person is used, as is done in every country. The third party also presents himself at night to smoke his cigar and explain the reason for his visit from the first night on, and naturally everything 584 cannot be arranged on the [illegible] night. He must come back 583 repeatedly, and meanwhile there must be no lack of gifts for the future parents-in-law. The suitor customarily also brings bits of firewood collected every morning at dawn, which the older people put into the room, whether the marriage is concluded or not (2).

584 2. Each day the person charged with making arrangements for the marriage, or the third

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584 party, gives the young suitor an account of what has happened, encouraging him to have hope.

583 When the old people want it and the daughter is pleased by the young man's manners, the matter is promptly concluded, and the husband enters the wife's house without saying a word for three or four nights, without letting himself be seen in it during the day. On the fourth or fifth day both of them present themselves to the public, sitting at the threshold of the door. Then the bachelor companions of the newly married man come to him and ask him a thousand questions, congratulating him on his luck. The young woman hears all this with much embarrassment, but this is the first and last time. She will not experience this again.

593 From what has been said it can be deduced that it is not the young woman who seeks out a man to marry, but he; and in the presence of her relatives, friends, or strangers, she will never manifest in any way her love for her husband,

583 however much she may truly love him. This reciprocal love often causes a maiden, because her parents are opposed to the union, to run away /207/ to live with her husband in another tribe for a long time, in the house of her relatives, and return with the marriage already contracted in fact.

585 The Chiriguano are not accustomed to having celebrations in connection with their marriages. Only after the marriage has been consummated does the mother of the newly married man, during the absence of her son in his wife's house, make chicha ferment. On the fifth or sixth day she calls them, has them in the house the whole day, makes them drink a little, prepares a small lunch for them with much affection for her daughter-in-law, gives both of them very sound advice, and sends them off as night approaches (1).

591 583 1. It is the law of the Chiriguano that the husband must live in the house of his father-in-law as soon as marriage is contracted;

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Chiriguano only the old men now have the tembeta. The Chiriguano chief Maringay, who still respects old customs, has the lower lip of all boys pierced. Maringay is one of the old ones who say contemptuously: The "ava," the man, who does not wear a tembeta looks like a "cuña" (woman). To call men the insulting word "woman" is to insult them in Chiriguano fashion. The ones who are "ava" say of the Chané, who have small tembetas, "cuñareta" (women).

Nowadays most of the tembetas are made out of tin and pieces of glass by the whites in mountainous regions. Among those who have made them is the Italian Pablo Piotti. His work has even managed to get into European museums, without ever having lodged in an Indian chin. In former times the Chiriguano also had tembetas made of transparent resin (1).

1. P. Chomé: Lettres édifiantes. Vol. XXIV, p. 317.

If the Chané or Chiriguano boy wishes to marry, he sends the parents of the girl all kinds of hunting booty. Vocapoy /212/ told me that he places wood in front of their houses. If the wood is used, it means consent, if he finds the wood untouched, he is rejected. If he has been successful with the wood, he asks the mother of the girl for her. She then answers that she cannot know whether he will be a good husband who can provide food for his wife. In order to demonstrate this, he must serve his future mother-in-law for about a year. Thus, marriage is a sort of purchase.

The Chané and Chiriguano men go courting nowadays in the same way that they did 200 years ago (1).

1. P. Chomé, op. cit., 319.

The night before the wedding, the young man sleeps with his girl. The wedding is celebrated with a drinking bout, with no other ceremonies than much drinking of maize beer. The newlyweds receive good wishes. As a rule, the young people go on living for a while in the house of the mother-in-law.

In places such as these in which women lose their attractions at an early age and in which men are decimated by the constant wars, the custom of polygamy is a social necessity for the tribe which would otherwise run out of members, and a physical necessity for the men and for many women who would otherwise stay single. Nevertheless there are not lacking loose women, free in their favors, for whom the Indians use the name of amoeccue. M 695 M 837

The man is jealous and cruel to his wife if he suspects her of infidelity. While we were visiting the camp of Peilõ we had the opportunity of hearing a husband, deep within one of the huts, beat and threaten his wife with death because she had been careless and fallen into the hands of a soldier. Nu-a-ilon-lã (I shall kill you) he ground out between his teeth. On another occasion a woman, after her husband had been absent for two years, took up with another man; the husband returned, lay in wait, ran after and caught his wife and slit her belly open with a knife before the whites could prevent it. This woman did not die and as soon as she was well returned to live with her would-be murderer.

When the Indians intend to get married they dye their cheeks and the region around the eyes red. The man will give his love a present at the time he makes his proposal and if the woman gives [184] an affirmative answer the man gives her a dowry of whatever he has, such as sheep, chickens, skins, etc. M 584 [302]

If the families approve of the union the couple goes to live near one of them, should they not approve then the pair leave the hut and often even leave the camp. Once consent is granted, the nuptial ceremony is the act of consummation.

Among the Chiriguanos, when a man wants to ask for a girl's hand he places a bundle of firewood and a small deer or other provision at her door; if on the following morning the woman lights the fire and prepares a meal with the food supplied, the proposal is considered accepted and the suitor repairs to the table. Some people hold that this is also a Mataco custom, but the facts which I have been able to glean about the matter do not confirm this. C 584

The Chiriguano chiefs, however, have a privilege, which is that they cannot be rejected by the women of their choice: this is a great stroke of luck for them. The chief reveals his inclination with the offering of a piece of meat or some other thing; the girl cooks it, and they then share both meal and bed. The chiefs, especially the C 584 622